



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

SUFFOLK COUNTY COUPLE PLEAD GUILTY TO FORCED LABOR, ALIEN SMUGGLING CHARGES

NEW YORK – Martin D. Ficke, Special Agent-in-Charge of the Department of Homeland Security's Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Roslynn R. Mauskopf, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York, and R. Alexander Acosta, Assistant Attorney General, United States Department of Justice today announced that Mariluz Zavala and Jorge Ibanez pleaded guilty to conspiring to commit forced labor; conspiring to recruit, harbor, transport and house undocumented workers; engaging in extortionate credit transactions; and transferring false alien registration cards.

The guilty plea proceedings were conducted before United States District Judge Sandra J. Feuerstein at the U.S. Courthouse in Central Islip, New York.

At the time of the defendants' arrests on June 21, federal agents executed search warrants at three Suffolk County, New York, residences owned by the defendants located at 5 Felway Drive in Coram, 4 Fourth Avenue in Brentwood, and 3524 Great Neck Road in Amityville, and took into custody 69 Peruvian illegal aliens, including 13 children, who had been living in cramped and squalid conditions. The agents also seized a large quantity of phony identification documents, including passports.

Between June 1, 1999, and June 2, the defendants, who are husband and wife, orchestrated a scheme to illegally obtain visas for Peruvian aliens seeking to illegally come to the United States. As part of the scheme, Zavala and Ibanez obtained U.S. tourist visas for the aliens, without the aliens having to undergo the required interviews and screening process, charging the aliens a smuggling fee ranging from \$6,000 to \$13,000 per person. Once the aliens arrived in the United States, Ibanez obtained fake alien registration and Social Security cards for them and, using the fake identification documents, found jobs for the aliens in factories located in Suffolk County.

The defendants confiscated the aliens' passports and threatened to turn the aliens over to law enforcement authorities if they refused to work. The aliens were forced to turn over almost all of their earnings to the defendants, who used the money to purchase houses, real property, and vehicles, and to pay for their own living expenses. In most cases, the aliens were left with only \$50 or less per week to support themselves and their families.

“Today's guilty pleas are another victory against those who abuse and exploit the innocent and vulnerable, and stand as an example of ICE's commitment to make our communities safer for everyone,” said Ficke. “As the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security, we are committed to using all of our resources and authorities to investigate and combat human trafficking networks.”

“The defendants in this case took advantage of desperate victims who would go to any length to come to the United States in order to build better lives for themselves and their families,” stated Mauskopf. “The defendants' convictions send a clear message that we will protect the victims of alien smuggling by prosecuting to the full extent of the law those who would exploit them for personal profit and gain.”

Acosta stated, “Human trafficking is no less than modern slavery, and it must end. We are committed to vigorously prosecuting those who seek to profit from the forced labors of others.”

When sentenced, Zavala and Ibanez each face a maximum punishment of 50 years imprisonment and a fine of up to \$1 million. As part of their guilty pleas, the defendants will forfeit a residence located at 3524 Great Neck Road, Amityville, New York, valued at \$175,000 and bank accounts containing approximately \$30,000 generated through their crimes.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Bonnie S. Klapper and Richard Lunger, and Adriana Vieco, trial attorney with the Civil Rights Division of the U. S. Department of Justice.

Anyone with knowledge of human smuggling or trafficking should call the ICE hotline at 1-877-DHS-2ICE (1-877-347-2423).

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement is the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security.